

Protesters in Plaid

*A Brief History of the Involvement of
Carnegie Mellon Activists in
Anti-War and Civil Rights
Movements:
1915-2005*

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Preface

“Most students [at Carnegie Mellon] are very caught up in their studies and frequently uninterested in helping others.”

The quotation above, posted to college review site *Unigo*, encapsulates a contradiction that is considered almost a given fact by so many at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU). The idea being that the individuals who make up the university—so brilliant and committed to their areas of study—are *too* brilliant and committed to their areas of study to engage with social or political issues of the communities within which they exist.

But what if it could be demonstrated—with examples spanning across decades—that this is not the case? Would that be enough to break the hold this stereotype has on the collective perception of the university? Even more importantly, would that help to spur a new era of activism driven by CMU community members?

Through the analysis of contemporary coverage of the university, this book aims to do just that. The text will reveal the variety of ways that individuals from CMU have engaged with social and political

movements throughout the school's history.¹ This book focuses specifically on the involvement of CMUers in civil rights and anti-war movements, examining the specific ways engagement occurred over a nearly ninety-year period.

Although this project utilizes a straightforward definition of “anti-war movements, the category of “civil rights movements” is less traditional. This section includes actions from not only the Civil Rights Movement—the fight for African American equality in the 1950s and 60s—but also those in the fights for women’s healthcare and queer equality. These undoubtedly fall within the broader understanding of civil rights—those which protect citizen’s access to social and political equality—and as such were included in this section.

With all this in mind, I leave you with one final quote from *The Labor Wars* by Sidney Lens, a book from which much inspiration for this project was drawn:

“I have written this book ... in an effort to restore some of the lost sense of kinship between the protestors of today and those of yesterday.”

¹ From 1912 until its merger with the Mellon Institute of Industrial Research in 1967, CMU was known as the Carnegie Institute of Technology (CIT). To reflect this history, pre-merger references to the university will be found as CIT.

Nicholas Stanley Mlakar

Please read critically and continually consider how the strategies of these bygone eras might be applied to our struggles today. If we are to advance these movements forward today, we must first take care to understand the foundation that has been laid by those before us.

Nicholas Stanley Mlakar

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Anti-War Movements

Introduction

A tradition almost as old as the institution itself, Carnegie Mellon has been the home of pacifist movements since nearly its inception. In this section, we will trace this activism from its beginnings in the period leading up to the First World War, all the way to the opposition to American wars in the Middle East of the early 2000s. The radical calls for the abandonment of war and the embracement of peace have been made by generation after generation of Carnegie community members. This section will illuminate this history and offer fodder for those who seek to continue this struggle today.

The First World War

Anti-war sentiments arose at the Carnegie Institute of Technology (C.I.T or CIT) as early as the 1910s. An organized outlet for these emotions, the C.I.T. Economic Society made its debut on campus in the middle of that decade. Formed to offer a platform for the discussion of “different aspects of socialism,” the Economic Society was not only CIT’s first political organization, but also offered the school its first taste of radical viewpoints.¹ The C.I.T. Economic Society was a chartered branch of the Intercollegiate Socialist Society (ISS), which sought to “promote an

intelligent interest in socialism among college men and women.”² It was in their first public meeting that the group began their campaign against the rapid military buildup that was then occurring across the globe.

This militaristic buildup was the central topic of discussion on the evening of 19 February 1915. The Economic Society, partnering with the ISS branch at the University of Pittsburgh and receiving support from the students and faculty at the Pennsylvania College for Women (now Chatham University), brought together “some of the most promising speakers of the present time” for what was to be a “monster anti-military meeting.”³ Speakers that night included the president of the Pennsylvania College for Women, the chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh, and professors from CIT and the University of Pittsburgh. The meeting was considered a “huge success,” with an estimated 300 people in attendance.⁴ To conclude the event, a resolution was drafted and put to a vote. “Resolved,” it read,

That we, the students of the Carnegie Institute of Technology, University of Pittsburgh, and the Pennsylvania College for Women, in public assembled, hereby go on record before Congress and the people of the United States as favoring the substitution of peaceful methods for solving international questions for war, and as opposed to any

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increase of the army and navy of the United States.

The resolution was carried with unanimous support of those in attendance.⁵

As the First World War raged on in Europe, the Economic Society found a campus population keen to the anti-militaristic and pro-peace ideas espoused by the organization. Calls for the abolishment of war came from Mr. Carnegie himself in October of 1914.⁶ For the next year and half, the Federal government's stance of neutrality was largely the sentiment of the CIT populace. If anything, the Economic Society's programming may have pushed the school's general opinion further in support of peace than the rest of the nation.

However, this pattern began to shift around the summer of 1916. As support continued to grow in the U.S. for active military intervention in the war, so too did its support grow at CIT. This was clearly displayed in the attendance of a lecture on military engineering given by a member of the U.S. Corps of Engineers, for which an estimated fifteen hundred engineers turned out.⁷

By the beginning of 1917, the Economic Society was becoming increasingly ideologically isolated within the CIT community. This was made particularly evident by The Tartan's rapid abandonment of objectivity on the issue. The paper

so feverishly promoted militaristic views of the time that it readily joined a Yale News Press Bureau program to distribute “literature and propaganda” on “national defense” and “universal military training” to college and school publications across the country.⁸ It was at this same time that Economic Society President Carl Greiner was in Washington D.C. representing the Society in a mass meeting that called on Congress and President Wilson to institute a national referendum on the war question.⁹ The editors of *The Tartan* vehemently opposed this stance, going so far as to call the action “ridiculous.”¹⁰ It was this public refutation of the Society’s president—and a core part of its ideological foundation—which led to a direct confrontation between *The Tartan* and the C.I.T. Economic Society.

Tensions finally boiled over in the 21 March 1917 edition of *The Tartan*. In a letter to the editor, the members of the Economic Society shared the text of a resolution which condemned the recent “agitation of militaristic sentiments” and the promotion of undesirable forms of patriotism by the paper. In response, the paper’s editors published a clipping from the *New York Times* which mockingly referred to The Harvard Union for American Neutrality—an anti-war organization at Harvard University—as “The Harvard Union for American Nincompoops,” and equated the Union’s calls for

continued American neutrality to inviting the German Kaiser to annex the United States.

While it is clear today that this was an unfair comparison, it was not so obvious to contemporary observers. Just three weeks after this public spat between the Society and *The Tartan* took place, one of the Society's faculty members—Dr. Harry Hower—publicly resigned from the organization due to widely differing beliefs regarding the war.¹¹ In this same edition of *The Tartan*, which had just pages earlier announced Hower's resignation, was a report that the student body had unanimously voted to implement the U.S. Government-recommended military training at CIT. This move was directly at odds with the anti-militaristic stance that the Economic Society had advocated for since its inception.¹²

The C.I.T. Economic Society did not hold another meeting that school year. And, aside from its appearance in the 1917 edition of *The Thistle*, the organization disappeared from C.I.T. written records. Just a little over two years after its bold inception at CIT, the Society was no longer. Though unable to overcome the virulent militarism brought about by the First World War, the first political organization at Carnegie Mellon left behind many lessons.

The Second World War

With the wounds of the “Great War” still being nursed, the CIT community of the early 1930s had an intimate understanding of what war looked like. It was this understanding that propelled many to oppose the burgeoning militaristic sentiments they saw on the local, national, and international levels. From this sentiment was born the Anti-War League (AWL). “Organized for the purpose of providing a means of expression of anti-war sentiment among the student body,” the organization marked the return of an organized anti-war group at CIT, the first on campus since the beginning of the First World War. Though little documentation on the organization remains, its position as an important escalation in the pre-World War II anti-war movement at CIT is firm. Although the organization appears to never have held any formal meetings, it represented an important first step in the peace movement at CIT.

By 1935, the anti-war movement at CIT had rapidly increased in popularity. Proof of this can be found in the attendance at an anti-war meeting in April of that year. With 350 students crowding an assembly room—and another 100 in the hallway—the appetite for these ideas was unquestionably strong. Led by a committee which included students Dudley Pendleton, John Robertson, Philip Morrison, and Will Landsberg, a resolution was drafted that included the following:

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We will not support that minority faction of Americans which seek to drag this country into war and we join with students and workers throughout the world in declaring our utter disbelief in imperialism as a policy which fosters and thrives upon war and suppression of civil rights. We oppose all attempts to rob the American people of their civil rights and any trends towards fascist government wherein our civil rights are jeopardized.

The resolution was approved by those in attendance and sent to President Roosevelt.¹³

Contemporary analysis of the meeting further underscores its significance. “Unprecedented in the history of Carnegie was last Friday’s anti-war demonstration,” wrote The Tartan’s Editorial Board. The Ed Board also saw the meeting as far more than just a haphazard display of collegiate dissatisfaction. “It was a definitely organized protest,” they wrote, “against the forces of reaction [and] the forces which produce war.”¹⁴ Concluding with a call for sustained action, the Ed Board wrote, “The machinery of war is too powerful to be overcome by mere pacifism. It must be actively opposed by a strong united movement which can build up propaganda AGAINST war in opposition to the propaganda FOR war which inevitably accompanies modern imperialistic struggles.”¹⁵

The CIT peace activists of this period were steeped in historical knowledge, which they leveraged in their fight to change the future. One prime example of this came during the observance of Armistice Day 1935. Holding a “Meeting for Peace” to honor the 30 million lives—which included forty-one CIT students or faculty—lost in World War I, those in attendance wanted to ensure that their colleagues’ lives weren’t lost in vain.¹⁶

Dr. Max Schoen, then-head of the Department of Psychology, was the event’s lead speaker. Addressing the cruel irony of war, Dr. Schoen asked the audience, “Who starts wars?” Answering his rhetorical question, Dr. Schoen went on, “Never the people of a nation as a whole; always one or a group of individuals in their own selfish interests. Who pays for wars? Never those who make it; always the innocent bystanders who have nothing to do with its making but who nevertheless carry it through, suffer for it, and continue to pay for it.”¹⁷ With an eye on what was to come, Dr. Schoen succinctly concluded, “Peace must be achieved by those who live for the future, not those who live for the moment.”¹⁸

While the peace movements of later years are more widely known today, the anti-war movements before, during, and after the World Wars established the foundation which those subsequent movements built on. Those early organizations united struggles

and built coalitions, strategies which would serve organizers at CIT for decades to come. Most importantly, the early peace advocates at the university openly embraced their relationship with a city and region well-known for its radical politics. They leveraged this history to advance the goals of university and community members alike.

The Vietnam War

The Vietnam War, and the anti-war movement it prompted, sparked a period of activism that is unparalleled in the university's history. Never before had so many people, from so many different backgrounds, engaged in social or political activism at our university. Although anti-war protests and teachings began to rise across the country in 1964, it wasn't until the beginning of 1966 that Carnegie Mellon saw its first activity regarding the conflict in Vietnam. In March of that year, a panel discussion was held to discuss the topic of Vietnam. The seminar, which aimed "to broaden the students [sic] knowledge of the Vietnam problem and all its aspects," drew an attendance of 160 students.¹⁹ This event was the beginning of a seven-year period of sustained anti-war struggle.

By the beginning of 1967, the peace movement was well established at CMU. This was made evident by the frequency of—and attendance at—anti-war events held throughout that year. Early

February saw the first of that year's demonstrations against the war. Students, “particularly concerned” with Carnegie Mellon status as “one of the nation's top Defense Department” contractors,” held a “fast for peace.”²⁰ The fasters—made up of CIT and other Pittsburgh college and university students —subsisted on fruit juices, water, tea, and if absolutely necessary, rice. The fasters hoped the event would serve as “‘an act of penitence’ for the war in Vietnam” while also drawing attention to the over \$3 million which the university received in Defense Department contracts in 1965.²¹

At the end of that month, a delegation representing Carnegie Mellon traveled to Ithaca, New York to participate in the National Student Conference on Vietnam. Held at Cornell University and attended by 150 delegates from 45 schools across the country, the conference was to serve “as a forum for learning discussing and debating over the United States policy in Vietnam.”²² The three-man delegation from CMU included Student Body President Joe Orens, Student Body Vice President Lloyd Patross, and the editor of *The Tartan* Richard Sextro. During the conference, delegates heard the perspectives of both pro- and anti-war speakers, attended discussion groups and full assembly meetings, and drafted resolutions. One of the major takeaways for those in attendance was the complexity of the situation in Vietnam.²³

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Student activists, keeping an eye simultaneously on the local and national levels, united with students and faculty from high schools, colleges, and universities across the Pittsburgh area to “form a coordination committee to plan local spring student action against the war in Vietnam.”²⁴ After thorough discussion, the committee elected to pursue an event in the image of the Angry Arts Week festival that had recently been held in New York City. This plan came to fruition in the beginning of April when “an estimated 500 people, mostly students and teachers, gathered in the pit Fieldhouse ... to witness ‘Angry Arts Against the War.’”²⁵

The Pittsburgh program included performances of various antiwar songs and skits, along with book and poetry readings. Non-artistic presentations included a speech from Western Reserve University professor, Sidney Peck, who “explained the importance of the peace movement.”²⁶ Peck, a leader of the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, was well-known and highly respected in the anti-war movement.²⁷ A letter from an American soldier in Vietnam was also read, which detailed the effect which the American military presence in Vietnam was having on Vietnamese civilians. The mood of the organizers following the event was encapsulated by Ellen Bergman, a coordinator for the CMU contingent of the Pittsburgh Students for Peace.

When asked about the event's turn out, Bergman shared that she was "surprised" by the number of those in attendance. "I can't believe it—this is Pittsburgh!"²⁸

The momentum of the anti-war movement was carried on into the following semester. October saw CIT students join with their counterparts from the University of Pittsburgh, along with others from the Pittsburgh community to host a peace rally on Carnegie Mellon's campus. The most notable speaker of the day was Monsignor Charles Owen Rice, a Catholic priest renowned for his involvement in the labor and anti-war movements.²⁹ Addressing the crowd, he urged caution: "In the name of God, we (the people of the United States) are strong enough to destroy the world—we will destroy ourselves."³⁰

Less than a month later, CMU saw what has become one of the most notable instances of student activism in the university's history: the anti-napalm dance rally. Organizing the event was the American Foreign Policy Forum (AFPF), an organization "of about 50 CMU students opposed to the Vietnamese campaign" who sought to "'disseminate information' and 'provoke discussion' on the Vietnamese situation."³¹ The immediate target of the event was Dow Chemical, "the chief manufacturer of napalm and other various defoliants and biological warfare weapons used by the American arm forces in Vietnam."³² Dow, on campus to hold a recruiting

session, had increasingly become a target for anti-war demonstrations across the country.

Reflecting on the reality that “if [they] were in Vietnam instead of America, [they’d] very likely be getting bombed with napalm,” AFPF decided to host a “dance rally” titled “Thank God It’s America.”³³ The event drew the attention of local media and Dow Chemical executives alike. A reporter from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette in attendance that day “expressed amazement” at the form of rally, “and wondered when the picketers would be arriving.”³⁴ In response to the protest, Dow offered a sit down meeting to the leaders of AFPF, “where a Dow PR representative could discuss Dow’s moral position on the Vietnam War.”³⁵ While it is unclear if AFPF ever took Dow up on this offer, the dance rally was a clear success and an exemplary example of Carnegie Mellon brain power applied to the issue of activism.

The following semester, AFPF—by then a leader in the anti-war movement at CMU—focused their attention on campus military recruiting. Circulating a petition which gathered 650 signatures, AFPF called for the ceasing of campus military recruiting “until Lieutenant General Hershey’s directive [was] rescinded, overruled, or clarified by the courts.”³⁶ Hershey—in his role as director of the Selective Service—had issued a directive compelling all selective service boards to reclassify any person who had participated in demonstrations opposed to

the “national interest” to the status of 1-A, or designation for immediate induction into military service. Widely criticized, the directive was seen as a clear attack on the 1st Amendment rights of student activists across the country. A faculty petition of the same focus was circulated the following week.³⁷ The directive was eventually overruled by the 3rd Circuit Court of appeals in January 1970.³⁸

Apathy amongst the student body, an issue which has beleaguered activists at Carnegie Mellon for as long as activism has occurred at the university, was first mentioned as a problem for the anti-Vietnam War movement in the fall of 1968. On the eve of Election Day of that year, the Students for Progress—a peace organization—organized a peace vigil. Held on the Cut, the vigil was envisioned as a forum “to give CMU the opportunity to find and define an attitude, not only towards peace in Vietnam, but also towards peace in the American ghetto and on the American College campus.”³⁹

Although the vigil brought together upwards of 500 people at its peak, it was considered a disappointment by its organizers. The main organizers from Students for Progress—George Gaspar and Bob Denham—felt that “no definite stand was taken on the issues discussed.”⁴⁰ Denham, reflecting on the possible outcomes of the event, was pessimistic. “[Now,] we go back to our classrooms. We’ve made a token—a gesture for ‘Peace.’ But nothing has really

changed.”⁴¹ The battle for student time and energy is one that organizers at CMU continue to grapple with to this day.

After a lull in the action during the spring semester, activists at CMU returned in the fall with a renewed interest in the movement. Across the country, leading anti-war activists set their sights on uniting the struggle on a national scale.⁴² This idea became what is today known as the Moratorium to End the Vietnam War. The moratorium—“one of the largest demonstrations in American history”—drew participation from an estimated two million people across the country.⁴³ Scheduled to take place on October 15th, a group of students kicked things off the day before, hosting a rally in the Cut the day prior. Janice Richman—part of the “small hardcore who fasted”—recalled that Tuesday as a “dizzying day [kicked off by] the pre-moratorium rally.”⁴⁴ Wednesday’s schedule of events began at 9:00 AM and was to contain the screening and discussion of several films, lectures on subjects including the “university-military complex,” and performances by the Fine Arts and Drama departments.⁴⁵ The day was capped off with an energizing rally before the crowd was led downtown to join the citywide demonstration. The CMU contingent—an estimated 700 people strong—joined the nearly 12,000 demonstrators in Point State Park. “It’s got to be the most incredible march Pittsburgh has ever created,”

one observer remarked, “whether Nixon likes it or not.”⁴⁶

With the October moratorium widely considered a smashing success on both the local and national levels, organizers were determined to continue to build off this momentum. A second moratorium was quickly planned, this one to bring together activists from across the country in Washington, D.C. Organizers at Carnegie Mellon wasted no time beginning to build for this action. Determined to “show [the world] we are not of the old apathetic CMU,” 50 students and faculty members attended a meeting to plan and organize the CMU contingent for the upcoming moratorium.⁴⁷ Setting a goal of “1000 from CMU to go to Washington,” organizers were determined to get anyone interested to Washington D.C. the following month.⁴⁸ “Just tell anyone who can't afford it to come to our next meeting. We'll get the money from somewhere,” said organizer John Agatston.⁴⁹ And, displaying that characteristic Carnegie Mellon determination, somehow they did.

“Our purpose was a serious one — to end and reverse a tragic mistake in American history.”⁵⁰ It was this sentiment that that fueled the bus carrying Erica Borden to the nation's capital that cold, November day. Borden was part of the Pittsburgh contingent headed to Washington DC for the November moratorium. Recounting the weekend in

an article for *The Tartan*, Borden described a Washington D.C. “infested” with anti-war activists. Upon their arrival, the Pittsburghers were thrust into role playing training sessions, where the necessity for “be[ing] flexible, think[ing] quickly, keep[ing] cool, and tak[ing] the initiative in case of trouble,” was hammered home.⁵¹

After a night of futile attempts at sleep, the following morning brought with it the March for Death. The march—during which demonstrators carried around their necks the names of soldiers who had died in the conflict in Vietnam—was a somber affair. “We sang solemn songs. Happy songs. Yelled ‘no more war anymore,’ and felt very much a part of the largest anti-war demonstration in history,” described Borden.⁵² Upon reaching the center gate of the White House, demonstrators were instructed to shout the name around their neck loud enough that President Nixon could hear them. Borden’s heart ached as she heard these names “ringing out [into] the darkness.” “The March for Death had been a success,” thanks in large part to the unified effort of those involved, which included “active GIs, veterans, priests, widows carrying their dead husbands’ names, and people in wheelchairs.”⁵³

Beginning early Saturday morning, protesters—grouped together by the states from which they came—began the trek to the Capitol Building, where that day's march was to begin. From

the Capital, marchers made their way to a rally being held at the Washington Monument. Stretching from the Washington Monument down to the Lincoln Memorial, those in attendance quickly surrounded the reflecting pool and the areas around it.

Speakers that day included senator George McGovern and Coretta Scott King, the widow of civil rights icon Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Performances from Peter, Paul, and Mary and Pete Seeger were also heard. “The climax of the afternoon,” Borden described, “was reached when it was announced that... A national wire service [had] reported that one and a half million people were present on the grounds. Doves were released in celebration.”⁵⁴

Firing tear gas into the crowds of peaceful protesters, police and national guardsmen were helpless to try and stop the diffusion of the radical ideology of peace. By then, the marchers, protesters, demonstrators, and activists had well achieved their goals. The Pittsburgh contingent, along with all those in attendance that November weekend, returned home knowing “that a peace community had developed.”⁵⁵

By the spring semester of 1970, anti-war demonstrations were becoming nearly a regularity for the CMU community. That semester’s major action took place in April, when a “day for protest against the War in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, and other related issues,” was declared.⁵⁶ The event was

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organized locally by groups including the Peace and Freedom Center, Pittsburgh Peace Coalition, Welfare Rights, and by CMU's own Students for Peace. The programming at Carnegie Mellon began on Tuesday the 14th with the screening of three newsreel films. The following day, a "four hour rally-forum" began at 11 am in the grass in front of Skibo Hall.⁵⁷ The forum featured speakers who discussed topics including, "the expanded war in Southeast Asia, inflation and the war, ... U.S. imperialism," among many others.⁵⁸ As was standard practice by then, the day's events were concluded with a march to the city-wide demonstration; this one held at Point State Park.

Almost exactly a year later, organizer's attention was drawn to yet another march in Washington. While it is unclear how many from Carnegie Mellon attended the 1971 demonstration in the nation's capital, there was at least one representative from the university there that day: junior CMUer John Manon. Manon eloquently detailed this scene that day in a front-page article for *The Tartan*.

Almost palpable in Manon's account of the day's events is the cloud of hopelessness which seemed to hang over the city that day. "Saturdays event had all the equip edge of the peace March of yesteryear, a 60s prototype demonstration transported into the new age of the 70s. But in time transit, something had been altered," Manon described.⁵⁹

“Pervasively absent on April 24th in Washington DC was an intangible common in aura of what might be crudely cataloged as hope.”⁶⁰ While this is just one person’s account of an event which saw an estimated turn out of nearly half a million people, this was far from the last time that a hopelessness plagued anti-war activists at Carnegie Mellon.

Successfully rallying energy that fall, organizers in Pittsburgh were able to host a successful moratorium in opposition to the ongoing war. The rally was organized “for justice, peace, and new priorities,” and was held at the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial in Oakland.⁶¹ Speakers that day included a priest, a Vietnam veteran, an ex-convict, and the secretary of the United Auto Workers Local 1020. The keynote speaker that day was John Froines, notable for being one of the defendants in the trial of the Chicago 7. Froines told the crowd that the anti-war movement “must gain humility and broaden its concerns.” He concluded his speech by calling on those in attendance to recognize the “inter-related[ness]” of the issues then facing the world.⁶²

The anti-Vietnam War movement at Carnegie Mellon, by then half a decade old, began to show signs of its age. After the October 1971 moratorium, there was little activity on these issues until January 1973. Returning once again to Washington DC were the anti-war activists. The Pittsburgh contingent this year numbered 80, though it is probable that no more

than a handful were from Carnegie Mellon. And while the turnout at this March numbered well over 100,000 people, in the eyes of Shelley Burhans, it suffered from many of the same issues that had plagued the march of 1971. Beginning with the title of her article in *The Tartan*—“DC Peace March: An Old Story”—the tiring spirit of the movements rank-and-file participants is perceptible.⁶³ While their commitment to their cause never wavered, the years of continued struggle weighed heavily.

Despite the feelings of dejection that pervaded the anti-war movement by the early 1970s, “on March 29th, 1973, the last U.S. military unit left Vietnam.”⁶⁴ And while it may at first be difficult to see how, after eight years of war, a victory for the peace movement could be declared, modern scholarship lauds the work of those anti-war activists. It was the anti-war activists who forced the United States to pull out of Vietnam, researchers from the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict concluded.⁶⁵ Furthermore, “the power of strategic nonviolent action to force an end to an unpopular overseas war” served to deter American military action for decades after the conclusion of the war, a phenomenon which became known as “the Vietnam syndrome.”⁶⁶

Peacetime

While an era of activism which saw some of the strongest and most widely embraced movements in our nation's history was no easy act to follow, organizers of the early 1980s sought to utilize the experience of those of the Vietnam era in their fights against the issues of their time. The first example of post-Vietnam anti-war activism at Carnegie Mellon was the nuclear convocation held jointly by the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon.

The convocation—"Solutions to the Nuclear Arms Race"—was part of a nationwide action against the rapidly increasing threat posed by nuclear weapons.⁶⁷ Comprised of a series of lectures on a variety of issues germane to the subject of the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the keynote speaker of the convocation was William Kincaid, executive director of the Arms Control Association. Event organizers from Carnegie Mellon were part of the CMU Peace Alliance, "a group of faculty and students concerned with the threat of nuclear war and related issues."⁶⁸ The event was the first in a series of demonstrations throughout the 1980s which sought to bring attention to the issue of nuclear war.

Another issue which dominated the attention of anti-war activists in the 80s was that of Carnegie Mellon's involvement with the Department of Defense. Often at the heart of these protests was the

Software Engineering Institute (SEI). The first of these demonstrations occurred in April of 1988.

On the morning of April 15th, “a group protesting Carnegie Mellon’s involvement in military projects capped off a five-day vigil at the clock tower in front of dirty hall ... by marching to the SEI and staging a demonstration.”⁶⁹ Of the approximately twenty people involved, about half were from CMU, with the rest being Pittsburgh community members.

Most notable of those involved in the demonstration that day was Vincent Eirene, a community member and leader of the demonstration who was arrested for lying in the street and blocking traffic. Eirene, who would become a serial protester of the SEI, was unfazed by the arrest. “If we are going to speak to the injustice then we have to transgress the laws that protect the injustice.”⁷⁰ It was not just community members that were outraged, however. Asked about her motivation for participating in the demonstration that day, CMU freshman Jen Saffron told *The Tartan*, “Our university should be a place for learning and growing and not affiliated with destruction.”⁷¹

Eirene wasted no time returning to the fight. In October of that same year he held a press conference outside of the SEI “to reveal ... the different weapon systems that Carnegie Mellon University and the Software Engineering Institute are involved in.”⁷² According to Eirene, this included

“the F-16 Fighting Falcon, a missile warning system, the B-1B Bomber, inertia navigation system, an advanced tactical fighter, ... and the strategic defense initiative.”⁷³ Following the press conference, Eirene and the demonstrators in attendance then marched to Warner Hall, where they planned to deliver candles to CMU Provost Angel Jordan. However, campus police were stationed outside Warner Hall, restricting access to only those with a valid CMU ID. Thus, one of the students in attendance gathered the groups’ candles and delivered them to Provost Jordan’s office herself.⁷⁴

While the ‘peacetime’ period of the 1980s allowed for some activists’ attention on the issue of peace to diminish, the events of the early 1990s jolted the movement back into action. A citywide protest of the conflict in the Persian Gulf took place in January of 1991. Gathering on the Fort Pitt lawn, 1,500 people from across the city came together to make their voices heard.

Credit for the organization of the rally was given to several organizations, including CMU Students for Peace and CMU Students Against War. Leading up to the event, CMU research programming student Peter Shell “[had] been working hard behind the scenes for CMU Students Against War. ‘I’ve been acting as a liaison between the other student organizations and the community organizations,’ he

said. This unity was the driving force behind Tuesday's rally."⁷⁵

Born from this unity was also the Committee for Comprehensive Peace. The committee was "made up of peace and justice groups from throughout Pittsburgh. ... it's not just students; it's families of troops, teachers, activists, ... it's a citywide coalition [for peace]."⁷⁶ The student activists present at the rally were also appreciative of the continued support by the veteran student protesters of the 60s who had continued to work with and teach, the next generation of activists.

Just weeks later, a delegation from Pittsburgh attended a meeting of the National Student and Youth Campaign in the Middle East. Representing the city was CMU junior Aaron Young and University of Pittsburgh student Jill Castek. Speakers at the meeting included Sana Odeh of Palestinian Academic Freedom and Aerial Denée of Movement Zero. Delegates first gathered in groups separated by a geographic region to discuss anti-war activities that had occurred in their respective areas. The assembly then came together to discuss topics that included stopping the war, bringing the troops home, fighting racism, and ending all occupation in the Middle East.⁷⁷

The anti-war protests of the 1990s were concluded by actions in opposition to ongoing sanctions against Iraq by the United States. In April

of 1999, activists “from the University of Pittsburgh, CMU, [and] community organizations” gathered outside the CMU post office.⁷⁸ Demonstrating the crippling nature of the sanctions, activists attempted to ship basic necessities—such as food and clothing—to Iraqi civilians. However, even these purely humanitarian packages were blocked by the sanctions. Protesters that day also spoke out against CMU's relationship with the Department of Defense. “We are not against the people of CMU,” said Vincent Eirene. “We are just against the injustices which drive this kind of research.”⁷⁹ The research Eirene alluded to included military contracts worth an average of \$49.5 million annually, which funded projects such as an offensive weapons system that was developed in 1991.⁸⁰

Wars in the Middle East

Just two months after the September 11th attacks, with much of the nation still reeling, peace activists in Pittsburgh presented a united front for their cause. On November 12th, 300 demonstrators comprised of “students from CMU and Pitt, along with members of religious groups, labor unions, and social action committees participated in a peace march.”⁸¹

The demonstration, coming during a time when so many heartbroken people sought revenge, was a critical instance of humility and thoughtfulness

in those dark days. Gathering at the Fence, the demonstrators moved across campus to the SEI and then down through the city to the William Pitt union. Unlike so many who blamed those of Middle Eastern descent or those who practiced the Islamic faith, CMU student Lisa Krebs demanded the country look itself in the mirror. In her speech to those in attendance, Krebs cited the “ignorance of American foreign policy” as the driving factor in the September 11th attacks.⁸² The demonstration, whose planning and execution was led by a combination of student and community organizations, was viewed as an exemplary instance of activist collaboration. CMU student Quentin Steenhuis, a member of the CMU chapter of Students for Peaceful Justice, cited this collaborative nature as the cause for it being the “largest and best planned [anti-war event] held in Pittsburgh since the 9/11 attacks.”⁸³

January 2003 saw CMU participation in large scale protests on both the local and national level. On January 20th, a “small but tenacious pack of CMU students” joined hundreds of thousands of people in Washington DC to protest American military involvement in Iraq.⁸⁴ The protest, organized by Act Now to Stop War and End Racism (A.N.S.W.E.R.) featured speeches from Reverends Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson. When asked about the demonstration, CMU student Paloma Guzman expressed to The Tartan her belief that “peace is a universal thing, it's

not specific to any ethnicity; It's a global idea. It's something everyone wants, and this protest reflects that.”⁸⁵ Despite the tenacity of those CMUers in attendance, those representing the university were disappointed by the turn out. “I think CMU made a really poor showing. It's a pattern of our generation, a pattern of settling for mediocrity and helpless apathy,” said CMU student Kersti Bryan.⁸⁶ The battle against apathy, a struggle faced by generation after generation of CMU activists, lived on.

Just one week later, Pittsburgh saw anti-war activists back in its streets. A weekend long event, the Regional Convergence Against War included “street theater, visuals, live music, lectures, and free food.”⁸⁷ “The protest, organized by various local groups including the Thomas Merton Center, and the Pittsburgh Organizing Group,” drew out around forty CMU students to the action.⁸⁸ Coalescing in the Cohon University Center, the group marched together to the protest chanting “drop Bush, not bombs.”⁸⁹ A testament to the intersectional nature of the peace movement, local churches, Green Party supporters, pro-Palestinian groups, and women's rights organizations all participated in the event. It wasn't the WMDs believed to be in Iraq that worried demonstrators that day, but the “weapons of mass destruction that plague our neighborhoods such as drugs, such as unemployment, and homelessness,” said Kareem Howard, an employee at the National

Council for Urban Peace and Justice.⁹⁰ This broad aperture to what was ‘peace’ was a unifying theme throughout eras of the peace movement, encouraging the unification of groups with diverse issue focuses.

Continuing to build on the momentum of that year, the Pittsburgh organizing group organized a rally and march in mid-March. Drawing participation from “between 800 and 1000” Pittsburgh community members—which included a strong contingent from CMU, the day began with “numerous speeches and some anti-war folk songs at Flagstaff Hill.”⁹¹ From there, the marchers made their way across campus and down Morewood Avenue. It was at this point that a confrontation began. Nearing the fraternity quadrangle, protesters and brothers of the Delta Upsilon fraternity became visible to one another. The DU brothers, counter-protesting in support of the conflict, had put signs in the front lawn and porch of their fraternity house with messages such as “bomb Iraq” and “honk if you love war!”⁹² While some words were exchanged between the groups, the confrontation never escalated beyond this and both groups were able to have their voices heard.

March 2004 saw the first of what was to become an annual tradition: an anti-war demonstration to mark the anniversary of the beginning of the Iraq war. The demonstration that first year, organized by a group of 55 local organizations, was held at Flagstaff Hill. Those

protesting that day also marched in opposition to the proposed Patriot Act. “After the main rally, the POG and CMU activists staged a sit in in the university center, which was attended by approximately 50 to 100 people.”⁹³ Though ultimately unsuccessful, the goal of the sit-in was to discuss CMU’s military contracts with university President Jared Cohon. Encapsulating the sentiment of those committed demonstrators was CMU student Daniel Papasian, who told *The Tartan*, “If making weapons that kill children is a good job, then I have no problem being unemployed.”⁹⁴

The following years’ anniversary march brought out 3,000 Pittsburgh residents, “[who] marched from Squirrel Hill to Oakland.”⁹⁵ This year, too, saw confrontation between the protesters and brothers of the Delta Upsilon fraternity. As they had before, brothers “displayed slogans such as ‘Iran is next,’ ‘blow up Iraq,’ and ‘I (heart) bombs.’”⁹⁶ Despite this, the demonstration marked Pittsburgh’s largest anti-war protest since the war had begun. Annual protests to mark the anniversary continued for two more years, drawing between 1200 and 2000 protesters each year. These marches “combined the forces of political activism groups in local colleges, universities, and the community,” which led to a pool of participants and robust support.⁹⁷

Spanning a forty-year period, CMU activists took part in rallies, demonstrations, and protests that

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fought the spread of militarism and opposed war domestically and abroad. The unifying idea of peace brought together activists from a wide range of backgrounds and propelled the movement into one of the most significant in American history. Individuals from CMU played a role in actions on both the local and national levels, showing the broad impact that the CMU community can have.

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Civil Rights Movements

Introduction

The 1950s and 60s saw political activism reach levels unprecedented in American history. The beating heart at the center of these revolutionary decades was the African American civil rights movement. People from every corner of the country took part in the fight, and those who did not surely knew someone who did. The situation was no different at CIT, where several ‘generations’ of students fought for what they knew was right. Their fight for true equality continues to this day. As such, this section covers just a small part of this ongoing struggle. Touching on some of the movement’s highest highs—and lowest lows—this section seeks to encapsulate some of the movement’s most notable moments at our university.

African American Equality

The story of civil rights activism at Carnegie Mellon begins with the CIT branch of the Panel for Americans. A national organization, its first branch was organized on the Los Angeles campus of the University of California in 1942. It made its way east from there, with a chapter established at CIT in 1950.¹ The organization took a straightforward approach in combating prejudice. “Send[ing] students of varying religious and racial backgrounds to speak

before civic groups, clubs, and schools,” the organization’s members sought to “foster better understanding [amongst the groups] and eliminate prejudice and intolerance.”² While little information on the early years of the CIT branch exists today, the club was well established by the 1952-53 school year. So much so that, in January 1953, members of the Panel spoke before an audience of Pittsburgh city officials that included then-mayor David Lawrence. For speaking engagements such as this, the club would select from its membership five students to create a panel. Each panel was to be comprised of a person of Catholic; Jewish; and Protestant faith, as well as an African American person and a naturalized American citizen.³

The Panel continued to grow in membership and influence in the following years. The 53-54 school year brought with it the opportunity to speak at the National Conference of Christians and Jews, along with the typical slate of appearances at women’s clubs and P.T.A meetings.⁴ The work of the panel was not limited to just speaking opportunities, however, and this became particularly evident in the 54-55 school year. Spurred by the May 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision which ruled that segregation was unconstitutional, the Panel was uniquely situated at CIT to foster conversations on this and other subjects related to racial inequality. Utilizing their monthly meetings, the 54-55 Panel

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discussed issues including the Supreme Court ruling and discriminatory practices in labor.⁵

The hard work of the Panel was publicly recognized in April 1955 when the organization was presented with \$500 as recipients of the James and Rachel Levinson Foundation Brotherhood Award.⁶ This distinction was given in honor of their “work in sowing racial and religious understanding.”⁷ By 1957, the CIT panel had made 62 speaking appearances to a total audience of over 8,000 and had seen participation by over 100 students. The core mission of the club throughout its existence was encapsulated succinctly by an unknown member who remarked that “we can’t destroy prejudice until we destroy the artificial complacency that leads us to think that we are not prejudiced.”⁸ By forcing their audiences to confront this complacency head-on, the panel challenged the racial, ethnic, and religious biases of so many across the Pittsburgh region during their years of activity.

The start of the 1960s ushered in a new chapter in the fight for racial equality. This was true for both the country writ-large, and CIT in particular. The spring of 1960 saw a new method of peaceful protest explode in popularity: the sit-in.

First making headlines nationally after it was utilized by four Black college students in Greensboro, North Carolina, by March 1960 sit-ins were taking place in 55 cities across the country.⁹ These protestors

often faced brutal treatment and harsh punishments.¹⁰ It was this mistreatment that compelled CIT's Student Congress to voice their disapproval. On March 23rd, the Student Congress passed a resolution that condemned the arrests of the protestors, encouraged continued resistance to segregation practices, and offered the aid of the university's students if they could be of assistance.¹¹

The issue of segregation reemerged in the collective consciousness of the CIT community in the fall of 1962. A petition was drafted and circulated on campus that explicitly condemned the racism that fueled riots at the University of Mississippi. The riots—a failed attempt at preventing the university's integration—drew disgust from across the county. While the riots and subsequent petition elicited a range of responses at CIT, one of the more nuanced thoughts came from William S. Huff, an assistant professor in the Department of Architecture. In a letter to the editor of *The Tartan*, Professor Huff questioned whether those signing the petition weren't throwing stones from the comfort of a glass house. "Why should we, students and faculty, address criticism to those in Mississippi," he challenged, "when we suffer, even preserve, on our campus fraternities that maintain discriminatory rules and practices?"¹² The issue of discrimination within CIT's Greek life was one that would resurface again in the

following years, however it largely fell on disinterested ears at the time of Professor Huff's writing.

By 1963, the CIT community was growing tired of the more passive methods of resistance that had been employed to this point. This was so much the case that in November of that year, CIT students were documented as actively participating in a civil rights demonstration for the first time. Acknowledging the coming weeks as a "crucial time" in the fight to pass civil rights legislation, a front-page article in *The Tartan* called on students to participate in a "Write-in for Rights." Beginning first as a rally at Smithfield Congregational Church, those in attendance were then to march to the Post Office to deliver letters to politicians urging their support of civil rights legislation. The planning of this demonstration was coordinated amongst numerous student- and community-led organizations.¹³ The event was considered a great success, with an estimated 7,000 participants delivering 5,500 pieces of mail. Also taking part in the action were numerous community organizations, including the Pittsburgh Catholic Interracial Council, Unitarian Youth for Civil Rights, Business and Professional Association of Pittsburgh, Americans for Democratic Action, and the Jewish Community Council.¹⁴

Carrying this momentum into the following semester, the city took part in a "fundraising fast and rally." The event was organized by CIT's student-led

Committee on Race and Religion, along with the University of Pittsburgh's student government and NAACP chapter.¹⁵ The fundraiser was held to solicit assistance for several community organizations whose missions focused on civil rights.¹⁶ With support from the CIT YMCA, Hillel, the Campus Ministry, Newman Club, Liberal Club, and the National Student Christian Association, the organizers asked students to skip a meal and instead donate that money to the cause. The event featured a speech from a representative of the National Congress on Racial Equality along with folk singing led by the event organizers.¹⁷

Indirect action—political resistance methods which are meant to create change without explicit confrontation of the actors involved—was the tactic of choice at CIT for most of the 1964-65 school year.¹⁸ This included the hosting of several speakers to discuss issues of racial equality as well as hosting fundraisers for the freedom fighters in the south. That all changed in March of 1965. On March 9th, Unitarian minister James Reeb was attacked and beaten in Selma, Alabama by a group of white supremacists. Reeb, a white father of four from Washington, D.C., had gone south to participate in a civil rights march being organized by Dr. King.¹⁹ His skull cracked after being bludgeoned with a club, he passed away in the UAB hospital two days later.²⁰

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This brutal murder sent shockwaves felt across the country. The CIT community wasted no time in organizing a response to the tragedy. Just two days later, 450 people—including students from CIT, the University of Pittsburgh, and the city's other colleges—took part in a demonstration held on the University of Pittsburgh's campus. The group marched for 60 minutes in silence to honor the memory of "those Americans who have been killed or have suffered for the cause of civil rights."²¹ For many participants, however, this protest was about more than just the travesty that had occurred in Alabama. This sentiment was voiced clearly by the president of the University of Pittsburgh chapter of the NAACP, Byrd Brown, who emphatically declared that the rally "was to protest conditions not only in Alabama but also in Pittsburgh and at the University [of Pittsburgh]."²²

Many of those in attendance at this rally, however, questioned whether they were doing enough. One of those people was Father Christopher Kennedy, a Catholic chaplain from Pittsburgh. Addressing the crowd, Fr. Kennedy expressed his doubt, saying "I have always argued civil rights and preached them. I have always worked, lived with, and been close to Negroes, but I also know that I have never laid my life on the line."²³ It was this sentiment that propelled over 100 area students to find a way to

do more. And by the next day, an opportunity had presented itself to do just that.

On Sunday the 14th Linda Watts, a Chatham student and the president of the Pittsburgh Friends of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), had received a call from the Montgomery SNCC branch. The Montgomery organizers were looking to hold a mass demonstration the next day at the Alabama state capitol building. Watts began circulating this information to her contacts at schools throughout the city, and by 8 pm that evening the first bus of Pittsburgh students was departing for Montgomery.²⁴

The organizers of the trip did not avoid adversity entirely, however. It was not until the first students attempted to pay for their bus tickets that the group was informed that the bus company would not accept payment by check. This spurred a series of phone calls that lead all the way up to the Chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh, who agreed to “open up the University safe to cash the checks” of the student activists.²⁵ This cash, along with \$150 that had been raised in an impromptu door-to-door fundraiser in the University of Pittsburgh’s dormitories, enabled full cash payment for all the necessary tickets.²⁶ With this near disaster narrowly avoided, the buses barreled out of the city, bound for Montgomery.

The Pittsburgh cohort did not even reach their destination before getting their first taste of the

police harassment that every seasoned freedom fighter was accustomed to. Lurching to a halt in the parking lot of a rest stop in Birmingham, the bus which CIT student Howard Shuck was aboard was quickly surrounded by police vehicles. The police questioned the group under the auspices of an alleged jaywalking violation. This ‘crime,’ devised by lobbyists of automotive manufacturers in the early 20th century, has a long history as a tool of racism and classism.²⁷ However, it was a story spun by Father Xavier Carroll that rescued the group. Fr. Carroll, a chaplain from Mt. Mercy College, told the officers that the group was bound for an educational excursion in Tallahassee, Florida. Whether it was divine intervention or plain dumb luck, the police bought the story, and the Pittsburghers were released to continue on their way.²⁸

Meeting up with the other busses the following day, the reunited Pittsburghers participated in a rally held at the Jackson Street Church in Montgomery. A march began from there, destined for the capitol building. The group, purposefully taking a route through predominantly Black neighborhoods, drew in members of the community and swelled in size as they made their journey. Finally coming into sight of the capitol, the convoy was halted by police. Ignoring orders to disperse, the marchers elected to sit where they stood and sing. The now-classic hymn

of those civil rights marches, We Shall Overcome, rang out across the capitol lawn.

Looking to join with another group of marchers who had coalesced across the street, some in the Pittsburgh party crossed the street and thus the police line. “This was when the horses appeared,” recounted Shuck. Ridden by County Sheriff’s deputies and State Troopers who wielded riot clubs and sticks, the horses began to charge. First at the smaller group opposite the Pittsburghers, and then on the students themselves.

Despite the ensuing chaos, the students continued to sing. The shrieks of pain were dampened only by the unwavering cries for freedom ringing out from the crowd. The police, who were by this time well-practiced in implementing violent responses to peaceful protests, surrounded the marchers and attacked in a highly coordinated manner. Shuck recalled seeing multiple people fall to the ground, bloodied and beaten. He himself was thrown up against a brick wall and narrowly avoided a blow, blocking it with his guitar.²⁹ When the dust had finally settled, ten members of the Pittsburgh group had been beaten, with two sustaining injuries severe enough to require a hospital visit.³⁰

Despite everything he experienced on the trip, Howard Shuck was unwavering in how he felt about what he and his fellow students accomplished. “I feel I have a responsibility to my fellow man,” Shuck said.

“[A responsibility] to allow him to walk in dignity where I am allowed to do so ... [and] to help him assert his independence and his status of human being equal to myself.”³¹

After the whirlwind of activity seen during the spring semester that year, it would have been completely understandable had CIT activists decided to take a break that summer. However, it was during those three months in 1965 that CIT junior Michael Malakoff became even more intimately involved with the civil rights movement. Coming to CIT from Takoma Park, Maryland, Malakoff spent his break in Mississippi fighting for civil rights as a member of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

Upon his return to school in the fall, Malakoff recounted his journey in a series of articles in *The Tartan*. His time in the south included a ten-day stint in jail, beatings at the hands of various southern police forces, and several run-ins with the Klu Klux Klan. Malakoff's account of his time in Mississippi provided an intimate and harrowing look into the reality for African Americans and “civil righters” as they fought for justice in the territory ruled by Jim Crowe.

Despite the weekly reminder of the on-going nature of the fight for civil rights that Malakoff's columns provided, the 1965-66 school year saw a relatively small amount of action on the issue at CIT. Several lecturers were hosted, including renowned

activist and community organizer Saul Alinsky, who visited campus in October of that year. The speaking opportunity was sponsored by the Internship Program of the Office of Economic Opportunity, which brought twenty-eight HBCU graduates to CIT to “complete courses in urban problems, report writing, literature and history and at the same time, work with such community organizations as Action Housing.”³²

It was two and a half years and a national tragedy later before activists from CMU again took direct civil rights action. On 4 April 1968, civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, sparking national unrest.³³ The city of Pittsburgh was no exception to this, and CMU students acted quickly to honor the face of the civil rights movement. The morning after his murder, a memorial service was organized and held on campus. Despite the best intentions of the service’s organizers, many in attendance felt the memorial missed the mark. Recounted in detail in a Tartan article titled “Diary of Disillusion,” the unnamed author encapsulates this sentiment in the first paragraph, writing,

We all hoped that the service would bear witness to a sincere change in the attitude of the white community. And yet, those who knew—those who had been at Selma, or in Montgomery, or on the March to Washington—those who knew realized,

slowly, sickeningly, that nothing had changed at all.³⁴

Following what many considered a misdirected—if not plainly underwhelming—service, over 100 CMU students and faculty proceeded to the memorial service being held in the Heinz Chapel at the University of Pittsburgh. There, a petition to the mayor was drawn up that called for the declaration of a week of mourning in the city, support for social programs aimed at the city's black population, and “a recognition by the Mayor's Office of the complicity of White America in the slaying of the Reverend Dr. King.”³⁵ After the conclusion of the chapel's second memorial service—necessitated by the initial service's capacity-exceeding crowd—the group coalesced and began their pilgrimage to the City-County Building.

Electing to take Fifth Avenue in its entirety, the marchers route took them straight through the “hard core area of Black poverty in Pittsburgh.”³⁶ This image—a “predominantly white group” of college students marching through their neighborhoods—initially jarred the black residents who resided along the route.³⁷ However, the echoes of “We Shall Overcome”—a song by then synonymous with both King and the civil rights movement—and the genuine sadness the group exuded eventually attracted members of the community into their ranks. This sight—a congregation of people, comprised of individuals of

varying racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds; unified by the collective juxtaposition of devastation and hope—brought on sobbing tears to several of those who bore witness.³⁸

Almost heartbreakingly metaphorical, the protestors learned upon their arrival at the City-County Building that the mayor was not in the office. Instead, an assistant mayor listened to the group's demands and then sent them on their way. "We left knowing that nothing had been accomplished," an unnamed disillusioned marcher wrote, "and that, once again, the issue had been successfully evaded."³⁹

Despite the frustration and dismay that so many felt during those days and weeks after Dr. Kings' passing, the CMU community refused to let the moment pass without enacting some tangible, positive change. This desire for positive change is what spurred the creation of the Martin Luther King Scholarship Fund. The fund, established to "further the cause[s] of civil rights and racial equality," called on students, faculty, and staff members to give what they could.⁴⁰ After a rousing fundraising drive held at the beginning of May 1968, 709 individuals had donated over \$18,500 to assist low-income, Black students at the university.⁴¹

In addition to fund raising efforts, many at CMU utilized this period of renewed interest in race-based issues to challenge their preconceptions on the subject. A quintessential example of this were those

who participated in the Cross-Cultural Workshop, hosted on campus that October. The workshop participants were separated into three distinct identity groups: African, Black American, and White American. The concept behind the retreat was “that by knowing people, one can at least glimpse the experience base of their culture and as result communicate across the invisible lines separating different experience bases.”⁴²

While many participants found it difficult to fully encapsulate their feelings regarding the workshop, all who took part were “profoundly influenced.”⁴³ Despite the declared goal being to familiarize the students with classmates of different races, a pair of participants described their experience as being more than just that. “It acquaints people with people.”⁴⁴

The opportunity for direct action in the fight for civil rights once again presented itself to the CMU community in the fall of 1969. This time, however, the issues were rooted right in CMU’s backyard. In the summer months of that year, the Black Construction Coalition had been founded to fight against the discriminatory practices of the city’s construction unions. Led by Nate Smith—the first black member of the Union of Operating Engineers—the Coalition demanded the unions reach 25 percent black membership within the next three to five years.⁴⁵ Leading demonstrations across the city,

the coalition successfully “forced city officials to close down 15 major construction sites” on August 25th.⁴⁶

With students still acclimating themselves to the issues after being away for summer break, it was up to the faculty to act. And act they did. With CMU in the process of building a new science building, those aligned with the Coalition saw this as perfect opportunity for the university to take a meaningful stand. In just a day’s time, 124 faculty members signed a petition calling for the halting of the construction of the science building, “until the conflict between the Black Coalition and the Master Builders and relevant unions [was] satisfactorily resolved.”⁴⁷ Growing increasingly frustrated with the lack of progress in negotiations between the unions and the coalition—as well as by the university’s seemingly-indifferent attitude to the situation—students and faculty members participated in demonstrations during the beginning of the following week. Black Monday, as it was called by Coalition leaders, saw several hundred members of the CMU community take part in a march to the construction site of the new U.S. Steel building. Once there, the estimated 3,500 protestors encircled the site and erupted in chants of “We want union jobs!”⁴⁸

Still dissatisfied by the university’s response to the issue, on the Tuesday of the following week, the Student and Faculty Senates passed resolutions calling on President Stever to “take further actions in

support of the Black Construction Coalition.”⁴⁹ Students at this time also began preparations for another demonstration, perceiving a lack of urgency by both the school administration and the unions. The group worked closely with the Coalition as they planned the demonstration, even declaring that the rally would only be held if the Coalition felt that it would be “beneficial to their cause.”⁵⁰

All these factors were considered by President Stever as he contemplated the university’s next steps. In a special meeting of the university’s Executive Committee of Trustees, Stever shared that a one-day moratorium would be held on Monday the 22nd . This hour-long moratorium—during which classes would be cancelled—would allow for “free and open discussion” of the on-going construction project.⁵¹ President Stever also shared in this meeting that he believed the “most promising and least harmful” option for the university was to resume construction following the moratorium.⁵² He arrived at this conclusion despite having received a petition signed by 125 faculty members and the recommendation by a committee of students, faculty, and administrators for which he himself called for, both of which called for construction to be halted until an agreement between the BCC and unions was had.⁵³

Despite his best intentions, however, the moratorium failed to quell the spread of discontent with the university’s handling of the situation. Adding

fuel to the fire was a faux pas made during his address at the all-school meeting. In describing a recent luncheon he had partaken in with students from the C-MAP program—a CMU initiative which recruited and supported Black students—Stever spoke of his realization that he was “really sitting with a bunch of human beings just like me.”⁵⁴ So upset was the campus community that students in the graduate school of industrial arts went so far as to pass a no confidence resolution. Citing his repeatedly displayed inability to “cope with the complex problems of [the] university,” it was resolved that they had “no confidence in President Stever’s ability to resolve the current and future problems of [the] University.”⁵⁵

After coordinating with BCC leaders Nate Smith and Byrd Brown, members of the Friends of the Black Coalition, and representatives from “teachers unions, several wards, church groups and other city universities,” it was decided that a demonstration was needed.⁵⁶ It was determined that just twenty people would be needed to block the access roads to the site of the new science building, and thus halt construction. With an estimated 1,000 students, faculty, and administrators gathered on the morning of Tuesday the 23rd, the energy and attendance more than sufficed. Meeting at the flagpole following an address from Dean Swank, the crowd broke into 3 groups and moved into position on the three access roads. Less than ten minutes after

taking their positions, the demonstrators had already successfully turned away a construction vehicle. However, following an emergency meeting of the Sub-Committee of the Policy Advisory Board, Dean Swank informed the protestors that the university would pursue disciplinary action—and even go so far as to seek an injunction—against them if they did not immediately disperse.⁵⁷

Despite its relatively short nature, the demonstration was considered both a practical and emotional victory. Participants were encouraged to hear that Dean Swank would recommend the university to seek an injunction against the construction workers, which would halt construction until an agreement could be had between the groups. Additionally, many on campus saw this demonstration as an unprecedented example of activism at CMU. “Students and faculty have been united as never before,” wrote a student in *The Tartan*. She continued,

‘Apathetic’ was the word most frequently used to describe C-MU in past years. The fact that an issue not directly affecting the lives of the members of the community (like food service for example) has aroused this much action and reaction, testifies to the fact that that is no longer the appropriate portrayal.

This action, and the sustained efforts which followed them, brought forth a variety of positive outcomes. At the university level, President Stever

was compelled to take several meaningful steps towards eliminating discriminatory practices at the university. This included requesting a civil rights compliance inspection of the university's contractors to be conducted by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, initiating a process to revamp standards for future contracts, as well as a review and possible renegotiation of existing contracts.⁵⁸ On the city-wide scale, these demonstrations played a part in the Black Construction Coalitions eventual agreement with the city's unions, which saw the creation of a program to recruit and train 1,250 new journeymen over a four year period.⁵⁹

As the page turned on the 1960s, a new organization arose on campus. Borne from the decade which saw an explosion of attention on the issues of Black civil rights was the Black Student Organization, which later became known as SPIRIT. Unlike any organization that CMU had seen before it, SPIRIT was organized "out of a need for minority students to be recognized, by themselves and others, on a predominantly white campus." The organization was conceived with an intentionally ambiguous mission statement in order to allow for the greatest flexibility in its capacity to address the needs of both individual Black people at CMU, as well as the Black community at CMU in its entirety.⁶⁰

Protesters in Plaid

As the first organization in CMU's history to cater specifically to the Black community on campus, many of SPIRIT's early events were wholly unique. One notable instance of this was in April 1970. Declaring the final week of the month "Black Week," SPIRIT planned an "exhibition of what black people are about, as well as some of the things SPIRIT has done."⁶¹ While all were welcome, the week was "not planned to bring Black and White [people] together."⁶² It was, rather, an opportunity to begin to recognize the significance and contributions of the Black community at Carnegie Mellon. Events that week included luncheons, seminars, dances, and a variety of performances. The week was concluded with an address from Betty Shabazz, the widow of Malcolm X.⁶³ If the many years of "Black Week" which followed are any indication of the successfulness of this initial occurrence, the program was a great success.

Even in its early years, the organization did not shy away from taking their action far beyond the confines of the CMU campus. In March 1972, three CMU students—including the president of SPIRIT—attended the first National Black Political Convention, held in Gary, Indiana. Attended by 3,000 delegates from forty-seven states and observed by an additional 4,000 guests, the goal of the convention was to form a Black political platform. Despite speeches from Gary Mayor Richard Hatcher and national political

figure Jesse Jackson, the CMU students in attendance felt the media's coverage of the convention failed to give it its due respect. "The papers either by-passed the convention or played up its negative aspects," SPIRIT president Diallo remarked. Despite the media's disinterest, the convention was considered an impressive success by those involved.⁶⁴

After the summer of '72, SPIRIT was shaken into action by the events at Southern University that following November. Southern, a HBCU which had long suffered from racist treatment at the hands of the Louisiana State Legislature, was closed by order of Louisiana Governor Edwin Edwards, following student protests.⁶⁵ It was during the demonstrations which followed this order that four students were arrested. The next day, November 16th, student organizers met with the university's president to seek his help in gaining their release. It was at this time that a fraudulent call was made to the police, declaring that the president had been taken hostage.⁶⁶ Writing for African American history reference site BlackPast.org, historian Euell Nielsen describes the events which followed:

Over 300 police and National Guard officers arrived on the campus in full riot gear and with a tank. They surrounded the administration building and ordered the students to come outside. As the students began to emerge from the building, the officers launched tear gas canisters at them.

Protesters in Plaid

One student threw the canister back in the direction of the officers, and shots were fired from the tank and from the surrounding officers. When the smoke cleared, two students, Leonard Brown and Denver Smith, were dead.⁶⁷

Acknowledging the reality that an event like that “could happen anytime to Blacks anywhere in America,” those who attended the memorial service at CMU held for Brown and Smith were determined to act.⁶⁸ While the only action which directly resulted from this was a meeting between SPIRIT leadership and CMU President Cyert, those in attendance widely agreed that they are “at CMU to acquire those skills that would permit them, as Blacks, to control black America’s destiny.”⁶⁹ This perspective undoubtedly stuck with those student activists for the remainder of their time at CMU, and likely well beyond.

Not held since 1970, SPIRIT brought back Black Week in the spring of 1975. The first week in March of that year was a showcase of “Black aptitude in music, mime, dance, dramatic readings and sports.”⁷⁰ The keynote speaker was African American poet Nikki Giovanni. In her speech, Giovanni challenged everyone to “foster and implement change on campus, in the community and nationwide.”⁷¹ Programming that week also included a dance in the Skibo Ballroom. The dance, featuring performance from JBC Band and Show, gave all in attendance “the chance to boogey down and party.”⁷²

The remaining four years of the '70s saw three more Black Weeks, all unique in their programming but alike in their purpose: "a week for and about black people."⁷³ Black Week 1976 was headlined by a speech from Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson. The address, "Blacks Beyond the Bicentennial," called on the nation to "recognize its 200th birthday, but not celebrate it."⁷⁴ Rather, Jackson offered, "we should assess the past and make a conscious effort to go forward."⁷⁵

Black Week 1978 featured a poetry forum, fashion show, and a talent showcase which included performances of Black music, dance, and theatre.⁷⁶ Finally, Black Week 1979 included a lecture given by activists Dick Gregory and Mark Lane, who spoke on the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the ways in which the media and American government had misinformed the American people about the events that had transpired before, during, and since.⁷⁷ During these years, Black Week offered campus the opportunity to see—front and center—both the "frustrations and hopes" of the Black students at CMU.⁷⁸

Continuing their efforts to increase awareness of the issues facing the black community, SPIRIT hosted a one-day conference, "A Black Student's Outlook for the 1980s" in April 1981. Broken into three sections—"The Black Woman," 'Education,' and 'Organizations,' conference organizers "hoped [the]

conference [would] be the beginning of increased participation in [their] struggle.”⁷⁹ The conference featured speakers from Pittsburgh universities, community organizations, and political groups. Attendance from the entire community—not just students—was encouraged, as the organizers saw it as an “opportunity for interested individuals to seek answers to important questions.”⁸⁰

Remaining in active and visible presence on campus throughout the 1980s, SPIRIT held several particularly notable actions in the spring of 1988. Kicking off that spring of action was programming to honor the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The theme, ‘Reclaiming the Dream,’ included an Afro American history workshop, a flagpole vigil, a performing arts tribute, and a memorial service. The day was concluded with a candlelight vigil.⁸¹ In describing the need for such a robust tribute, SPIRIT leader Nicole Austin explained,

A lot of people in the 1980s, black people in particular, seem to think that the struggle is over and there's nothing left to fight for. I come across a lot of people at this school who say ‘oh, there's no prejudice at Carnegie Mellon, what do we need groups like spirit for?’⁸²

The day’s events were about more than just honoring Dr. King, according to Austin. It was about showing people that the struggle was not over and that “things

really [hadn't] changed that much ... racial injustice [had just become] more subtle.”⁸³

SPIRIT continued to reinforce the on-going reality of the Black struggle as they began their celebration of Black History Month in 1988. The month was kicked off with a speech given by Bobby Seale, the co-founder and former chairman of the Black Panther Party. Seale spoke on the history of the party and detailed the “principles of organizing” a political action group. The month also included workshops on black culture and history, a discussion on SPIRIT’s past and present, and was concluded with a “Celebrating Our Heritage” party. This was the first Black Month at Carnegie Mellon and was considered a resounding success.⁸⁴

Austin continued to be a leader in Carnegie Mellon’s black community’s struggle for equality in the fall of 1988 when she led a group of nearly 40 students into the office of Associate Dean of Student Affairs, Lois Cox. While the emotions that drove this demonstration had been festering for nearly three years, the release of a calendar by the Student Affairs Office that contained a racist caricature was the impetus for the protest. The group—protesting a perceived pattern of insensitivity and racism at the university—occupied the office for almost an hour.⁸⁵

Austin and those protesting saw education as the way to address the rampant insensitivity on campus. One week later, a group of seventy-five

administrators, faculty, and students gathered to address just that. Black students in attendance aired their grievances with past instances of insensitivity, questioned recent actions taken by the university, and suggested changes to university curricula to better represent ethnic minorities. As SPIRIT and its members had repeatedly demonstrated, they well understood the need for a long-term outlook in their struggle. “We still have a long way to go,” Austin told *The Tartan* following the meeting. “We’ve done the best we could as far as trying to get something started.”⁸⁶ This was, they knew, just the beginning.

It was a tragedy that civil rights leader Reverend Jesse Jackson described as “state sponsored terrorism” that initiated a series of racial justice-focused actions at Carnegie Mellon in the mid-1990s. The tragedy Jackson described was the police killing of thirty-one-year-old Jonny Gammage. On October 12th, Gammage was stopped by Brentwood police for a traffic violation. While police accounts of the events which followed contend that Gammage initiated an altercation, it is unclear exactly what ensued. What is known for certain, however, is that Gammage wound up on the ground with police officers kneeling on his back. At some point, he stopped breathing. Gammage was pronounced dead upon arrival at Mercy Hospital.⁸⁷

While the immediate reaction of the Carnegie Mellon community was somewhat limited, by the

beginning of the following semester attention on the case had grown significantly. In February 1996, a conference was held on campus to discuss the subject of police brutality. Playing a leading role in this event was the Campus Coalition for Peace and Justice (CCPJ). Speakers included Narves Gammage—Jonny’s mother, Sala Udin—a Pittsburgh City Councilperson, and Khalid Raheem—a local civil rights activist. Julio Rosenblatt, an organizer with the CCPJ, emphasized the need for the conference to be just one step in the fight for justice, “This is a conference ... where we’re trying to organize activities to make sure that justice is seen in the face of Jonny Gammage, and justice will prevail in all these cases and this will not continue.”⁸⁸ An overarching theme in all speeches given that day was the idea that the sickening actions that led to the death of Jonny Gammage were part of a larger, systemic issue.

As spring wore on into summer, the trials for the three officers who had been charged in Gammage’s killing began. In this instance, however, the justice system failed to live up to its name. In October, a mistrial was declared in the trial of two of the officers involved. Though they would eventually be tried again, that trial also ended in a mistrial, thus closing the door on any legal consequences for their actions.⁸⁹ Despite this, many still held out hope that the trial of officer John Vojtas—the Brentwood policeman who initiated the altercation with

Gammage and later said “I hope he dies,” as he walked away from Gammage’s motionless body.⁹⁰ It was these facts that made the “not guilty” verdict that much more devastating—and enraging—for all involved with the case.

Taking to the streets, activists from Pittsburgh universities joined with community members to make their voices heard. Despite the flood of emotions experienced that day, no one remarked being surprised by the verdict. “It’s not a surprise that he was acquitted,” stated one protestor encapsulating the sentiment of many. “This is a racist legal structure designed to protect racists.”⁹¹ Following the trial, John Vojtas continued his career in the Brentwood Police Department for another twenty years. He retired in 2016 after 32.5 years in law enforcement.⁹²

It is here, over forty years’ worth of history later, that this section of the project must come to a close. This is not to say that it is here that history ends, however. This could not be further from the truth. Despite four decades of work by CMU activists, our university—and the city, state, and country within which it exists—has much progress yet to make. The issue of racial equality presents a daunting challenge to organizers today, much as it did to those in periods past. Nevertheless, CMUers have never been known to shy away from a challenge. Armed with the accumulated experiences of those

who fought before them, the fight for equality continues to be carried out by able hands.

Women's Healthcare

The Birth Control Committee

While the topics of birth control and abortion were the subject of conversation on campus throughout the 1960s, it wasn't until the end of the decade that students began to take direct action on the issues. The first organized action in the fight for women's healthcare was an offshoot of the student government. This organization—the Birth Control Committee—was established as an ad-hoc Student Senate committee during the 1968-69 school year. The committee was tasked with “provid[ing] the campus with accurate and complete information on how to avoid unwanted pregnancies.”⁹³

The committee started first by organizing a lecture series which was to provide information on the various birth control methods available at the time. The committee's major focus was, however, on finding a text covering the subject which could be distributed to the campus community. It was in the *Birth Control Handbook*, edited and published by students at Canada's McGill University, they got just that.

Students at this English-language university nearly 500 miles to the Northeast had been confronting many of the same issues as their CMU

counterparts—and in many of the same ways. On their campus, too, had been formed a Birth Control Committee to “investigate the problems of contraception.”⁹⁴ Taking matters into their own hands, a group of eight students, along with a professor of gynecology and a practicing gynecologist, devised a handbook to “eliminate the general ignorance of contraceptive methods.”⁹⁵ The handbook was not only a huge success at McGill and beyond, it was also just what CMU’s Birth Control Committee was looking for.⁹⁶ Retaining a lawyer to navigate the maze of American customs laws, the BCC succeed in securing 10,000 copies of the Handbook for free distribution to any interested CMU student.⁹⁷

Following the positive reception of the Birth Control Handbook on campus, the BCC moved to directly address one of the most controversial forms of family planning: abortion. With nearly three years before the Supreme Court would ensure legal access to an abortion in its *Roe v. Wade* decision, abortion remained effectively outlawed in Pennsylvania. This forced those seeking the procedure to make the costly trip to New York—where abortion was legal—or turn to unregulated, illegal abortion methods. The BCC—and by extension the Student Government—addressed this in the fall of 1970 with the establishment of a “fund and referral service available

to C-MU students for legal abortions or maternity expenses.”⁹⁸

The fund, financed by a \$2,000 contribution from the budget of the Student Government, granted loans in sums of \$200 to cover related expenses. The confidentiality and safety of applicants was of great concern, as was evident in the strict procedures regarding applicant information and the absolute prohibition of the use of money from the fund for “backroom abortions.”⁹⁹ The fund’s commitment to privacy makes it difficult to ascertain exactly how long it existed or how many loans were distributed; however, it remained in operation for at least several more years. By 1972, it had become known as the Medical Loan Fund.¹⁰⁰ Its name was again changed in 1973 to the Student Health Fund when the Peer Help Center took over its administration.¹⁰¹

An Independent Pro-Choice Movement

Despite the progressive actions of the Student Government on the issues of birth control and abortion in the late 60s and early 70s, it wasn’t until the 1980s that independent pro-choice group appeared on campus. Totalling nearly forty members strong, the CMU Pro-Choice Involvement Committee was a “network of people dedicated to keeping abortion safe and legal.” The group, first organized in 1983, hosted “postcard tables, movies, and distribut[ed] pro-choice information to the campus.”¹⁰²

Carrying on the pro-choice torch were the Students for Choice (SFC). Holding their inaugural meeting in March of 1985, the organization's focus was to "lobby against legislation that would prohibit a woman from obtaining a legal abortion." Even then—just twelve years after the *Roe v. Wade* decision—the organizers were acutely aware of the institutional attacks on abortion rights. "The abortion question is at a crucial stage," SFC co-founder Katya Robinson told *The Tartan*. "One more Reagan appointed Supreme Court Justice and the landmark decision of the Court in 1973 on the *Roe v. Wade* case could be overturned."¹⁰³ The approximately twenty-five students in attendance at that first meeting "amazed" the group's organizers and demonstrated the desire on campus for such an organization.¹⁰⁴

SFC was committed to direct action from the outset. Just weeks into the 85-86 school year, the group had already begun to make an impact in the city. In mid-September, twelve SFC members joined members of the National Organization for Women (NOW) to escort individuals going to and from gynecological healthcare appointments. With patients and staff alike fearing violence at the hands of pro-life protestors, the SFC and NOW members served as "buffers" and "moral support."¹⁰⁵ No violence was experienced that day, thanks in no small part to the presence of the SFC.

Continuing their activity that fall, SFC hosted a screening of the movie “The Silent Scream” in November. The decision to show such a movie—which shows a “very graphic” depiction of “the actual process of abortion”—might at first seem a confusing decision for a pro-choice group. An SFC organizer explained the decision, telling *The Tartan*,

[We] want people to make informed decisions. Granted, abortion is not a pretty sight and is not the thing you just go and do on your holidays ... but for some, it is the only solution to a grave problem. ... we (SFC) are only trying to make sure that a woman has the supreme control over her own body, guaranteed by law.¹⁰⁶

Aptly describing the goal of the SFC was *Tartan* editorial assistant Albrecht T. Powell, who wrote, “All [SFC] ... wants to do is inform the people.” Concluding the article in what today reads as darkly prophetic, Powell went on to write, “The [abortion] decision, at least for now, is up to the individual.”¹⁰⁷

The focus of the organization that spring was on organizing for the March for Women’s Lives, a protest to be held in Washington, D.C. by NOW to commemorate International Women’s Day. A major part of this recruitment effort by SFC was the hosting of a lecture by Sheri O’Dell, the then-Vice President of NOW. Coming to campus to “raise hell,” O’Dell spoke on the need for a pro-choice march. The Reagan administration’s attempts to restrict abortion

were just part of the government's ultimate plan to "turn back the clock" on reproductive rights and repeal "20 years['] worth of civil and social progress."¹⁰⁸ The march was also to demonstrate support for the Civil Rights Restoration Act, a bill which prevented sex-based discrimination in educational programs or activities which received federal funding.¹⁰⁹ O'Dell concluded her speech by reminding those in attendance what fun marches can be and encouraged "any student who care[d] to defend his or her rights" to attend.¹¹⁰

Thanks to a concerted tabling effort by SFC in the weeks leading up to the march, the contingent of pro-choice protestors from Carnegie Mellon numbered fifty strong.¹¹¹ Boarding the bus at 4:30 that Sunday morning, the group was bound for D.C. After the five-hour ride to the capital, the Tartans joined the mass of 125,000 pro-choice marchers who filled the D.C. streets "past the White House and on around towards Capital Hill [sic]," said Amanda Cohen, a staff writer for *The Tartan* who marched that day.¹¹² Cohen later recalled that,

Everyone was marching for people who couldn't be in Washington ... people who marched with us in spirit. Friends who were too busy, parents who thought they were too old, people who thought they were too far away, people who had died for lack of rights.¹¹³

Brought to the stage amidst chants of, “For our Grandmothers, for our Mothers, for our Sisters, for our Daughters, Forever!!” was the oldest marcher in attendance that day. At ninety-two years old, the woman had begun her life as an activist marching for woman’s suffrage in the early 20th century. “With [her] achievement in mind,” wrote Cohen, “it was easy to feel that our persistence in the fight for the cause would not fail.”¹¹⁴

Boarding up the buses again that evening, this time headed back to Pittsburgh, the morning’s feelings of excitement and anticipation were replaced then by wonder and awe. “Leaving D.C.,” Cohen concluded her article, “some of us marveled at the realization that in one day, we had left our school and city to go to the Capital of the United States, because we believed we had something to say there. ... Nearly everyone slept on the way back to Carnegie Mellon, tired of the day but not of the cause.”¹¹⁵

While pro-choice activities continued on campus in the subsequent years, it was not until another D.C. march was planned that large-scale, direct action was taken by CMU community members on the issue. This 1992 march was organized by NOW to demonstrate support for what was to become a landmark abortion rights case—*Planned Parenthood v. Casey*. The case—which originated in Pennsylvania—was about to be heard by the Supreme Court in the weeks following the march.¹¹⁶ The pro-

choice crowd at CMU was by this time represented by a new organization—the Campus Association for Reproductive Rights (CARR). CARR organized for the march for weeks in advance, even hosting a NOW organizer to lead a training session on civil disobedience. While the exact number of Tartans in attendance is not known, photos appear to show several from the CMU community carrying a CMU CARR banner. Those from CMU made up part of the estimated 250,000 people who descended on the capital that day.¹¹⁷ This was, at the time, one of the largest protests in the capital’s history.¹¹⁸

CARR continued to be a pro-choice presence on campus in the years that followed. The organization, operating out of the Women’s Center, hosted fundraisers for reproductive rights groups, escorted patients at abortion clinics, and screened topical films. These efforts—along with those of the pro-choice activists of CMU’s past—likely played in Carnegie Mellon being “largely pro-choice.”¹¹⁹

Queer Equality

Gay and Lesbian Alliance

While the 1970s brought about a new era in the fight for gay liberation across the country, CMU was largely unaffected. It wasn’t until the mid-80s that campus saw widespread, organized efforts on issues of the gay community. It was in the fall of 1985 that “after years of silence, homosexuality [was] suddenly

becoming an issue at CMU.”¹²⁰ Bringing this conversation to the forefront of campus discussion was a fledgling student organization, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance (GALA). GALA, first announcing itself to the university in a small advertisement on the twenty-sixth page of *The Tartan*, was a “confidential” and “informal support group” that dealt with issues of concern to the gay community.¹²¹ Hosting speakers, screening films, and fostering discussions on relevant topics, GALA quickly became the cornerstone of the gay community at CMU.¹²²

GALA not only organized programming to directly address the issues of the gay community at CMU, but also worked diligently to strengthen the relationship between the community and the rest of the university. One of its most notable means of doing this was its hosting of an annual dance. These dances were open to all members of the campus community—as was the case for all GALA events—and offered the opportunity for people to come together as people, irrespective of their sexual orientation. By the spring of 1988, the Alliance had held three successful dances and was well prepared to make the fourth their best yet. Packing a ball room in Skibo Hall, the event began without a hitch. However, around 10:30 pm that night, the campus police received an anonymous call which threatened everyone in the building. “Get those gays out of Skibo or we’ll blow it up at 11:00.”¹²³ While the bomb

threat was never substantiated, and the dance was able to continue after an evacuation and search was conducted, the threat was emblematic of the hostility that the gay community faced at CMU during this time.

Despite this adversity, GALA and the gay community refused to allow bigotry to dissuade them. Regrouping in the months following the threat, by that fall they were ready to host another dance. Chosen to mock the cowardly act of the previous semester, GALA dubbed the event the “Duck and Cover Dance.” With an attendance of around a hundred people, the night was considered a great success. “By sponsoring their dance, the members of GALA displayed a hell of a lot of character,” wrote The Tartan’s Editorial Board. Overcoming both the “‘normal’ prejudices of which they [were] victims” and “the extremely violent ignorance” which led to the bomb threat, GALA epitomized the resilient nature of those in CMU’s gay community.¹²⁴

cmuOUT

As the 1980s came to a close, the new decade brought with it a new campus organization—cmuOUT. “An organization which promote[d] the interests and community of lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals on campus,” cmuOUT quickly began to take significant action in the fight for equality and the end of discrimination based on sexual orientation.¹²⁵

In March 1990, cmuOUT member Neil Thornton spoke on behalf of the organization at a Pittsburgh City Council hearing. The hearing—which was held to debate a proposed city code amendment that would have prohibited discrimination based on sexual orientation—offered a very public opportunity for cmuOUT to have their voices heard. Thornton took advantage of this moment, citing the ineffectiveness of CMU’s anti-discrimination policy as evidence for the need for city council action to be taken.¹²⁶ The efforts of Thornton, cmuOUT, and the other members of the CMU community who spoke at the hearing that day were a success. The legislation was later passed, and sexual orientation became a protected class in the City of Pittsburgh.¹²⁷

In the years following, cmuOUT continued their fight for better queer representation on campus. In 1990—with Homecoming Weekend and National Coming Out Day falling in the same week—the organization planned several events. This included hiring a plane to pull a gay pride banner over campus during the Homecoming festivities.¹²⁸ Additionally, several articles were published in *The Tartan*, along with displays erected around campus to celebrate the gay community.

This was not, however, received warmly by everyone at CMU. In the weeks following, the fence was painted “cmuOUT get out” by students who “hated fa**ots.” That same week, a letter was found

Protesters in Plaid

in a Morewood Gardens bathroom that questioned whether there was a “single real man left on campus” given “all [the] National Coming Out Day shit.”¹²⁹ The fence was quickly repainted “live free, love free” by cmuOUT allies who, in doing so, displayed the communities characteristic resilience—a trait which they were forced to exemplify.

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Afterword

From the outset of this project, I had hoped that this project would achieve two related goals. As a piece of historical research, I sought to diligently document the activist past at our institution. In doing this, however, I also hoped to illuminate the methods and strategies applied by the activists of the past to inform and inspire those who carry on their struggles today. It will be up to you to determine my successfulness in these endeavors.

As it was only possible to include a small portion of the information that exists on these events, I encourage you to dig deeper into those which are of the greatest interest—or relevance—to you.

Finally, I urge you to remember that all those who took part in the movements detailed in this project were regular people. They were regular people who were willing to dedicate themselves to a cause. If the 2020s are to bring about the change that so many desire, it will take a mass movement of people just like you and I.

“Human beings with all their faults and strengths constitute the mechanism of a social movement. They must make mistakes and learn from them, make more mistakes and learn anew. They must taste defeat as well as success, and discover how to live with each. Time and action are the teachers.”

-Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

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